



The Hungarian Parliament on the Danube river is an impressive Neo-gothic structure - the world's largest parliament building when it was completed in 1902, with a staggering 691 rooms, a 315-foot (96-meter) dome, spectacular Congress and National Assembly halls, and interior treasures and artwork provided by nearly every contemporary artist of the time. It was constructed with a near-limitless budget.

Budapest : Convenient, & lots of fun

European travel! Visiting places you have only read about or imagined. And at last, you find yourself living in Europe, in the middle of a continent overflowing with rich culture and history, eager for exploration...

In recent articles, I provided a number of outstanding day-trip ideas for nearby locales like Regensburg and Nuremberg.

In this article, I will take you on a virtual tour of Budapest, the capital city and jewel of Hungary.

Not sure what to expect of the city services as a first-time visitor to Budapest, I was most impressed by their excellent public transportation system.

It was a delightful added convenience that did away with the expense and stress that tourists are often troubled with. It was clean, well run, on time, with several options. The bus system is top-notch. Each bus has a clear number on it so you will be sure to get on the right one. You can buy a packet of tickets at various convenient locations, then simply validate them as you board the bus.

No frustrated attempts at butchering a few words of Hungarian, one of

the most difficult languages to learn, to a cab driver. Busses have their own reserved lane of traffic on most roads in Budapest. This is the main reason they are able to move around so efficiently.

If a courageous driver decides to save time by driving in the bus lane, he can expect to be pulled over by the police with a paddle, not unlike the ones the German Polizei use.

Then there are trams—electric busses that ride on their own tracks—to provide visitors another option to move around the city smoothly. Budapest also has the oldest subway in Europe, but don’t let its age fool you. It’s extremely clean and well run.

Trains are also available throughout the city to take you to the more rural locations like the town of Szentendre, (St. Stephens), an interesting collection of shops and restaurants, and a museum dedicated to the artistic use of marzipan.

Buy a one-way train ticket, then hop on a boat for a 45-minute excursion on the Danube, Europe’s second longest river. Your hotel can give you information on which bus, tram, train or metro goes to which locations, and soon, with just a little practice, you will be able to navigate the city like a native. Once you have familiarized yourself with the transportation system, your options are endless.

Some of most fascinating sites in the European Union can be seen and enjoyed in Budapest.

The Hapsburg Empire included three famous European capitals—Vienna, Prague, and Budapest. There are many who believe the Hungarian capital to be the grandest of them. Budapest is impressive, clean, and generally safe if you stay on guard for pickpockets.

The city itself is actually a combination of three cities—Buda and Obuda on the mountainous west side, and Pest on the flatter east side of the Danube.

“There are two kinds of people who live in Budapest,” a tour explained during our trip. “The ones who live in Buda and the ones who want to live in Buda.”

Loved by those who live there and those would love to live there, the city offers an endless array of spectacular attractions in each of the three distinct city areas.

High on a hill overlooking the river is the sprawling Hapsburg Royal Palace on Castle Hill. Most of the present palace was built in the 18th century by Queen Maria Teresa, yet this structure was predated by another palace and two castles dating from 1253.

While there is nothing of particular significance to see in the palace, its grand outer appearance as it looks down across the Danube upon the Hungarian parliament building is worth a see.

This massive Neo-gothic structure, the world’s largest parliament building when it was completed in 1902, has a staggering 691 rooms, a 315-foot (96 meter) dome, spectacular Congress and National Assembly halls, and interior treasures and artwork provided by nearly every contemporary artist of the time, as it was constructed with a near-limitless budget. Guided tours are the only way to see the interior, and it is worth the visit.

The main player in Hungarian history is King Istvan I who came to power about the year 1000 and brought both civilization and Christianity to the state, laid the foundations for the future country of Hungary, and was wildly popular.

After his death, he was canonized and became St. Stephen whose basilica, arguably the most impressive in the city, is visible from the entire city. There are churches, and there are churches. This is one of the world’s top-ten, must-see church structures. See it!

The dome is 315 feet high, the highest allowable height in Pest. The 96-meter maximum height is to commemorate the arrival of the

Magyar race from the Ural Mountain area of north central Asia in 896. Amazingly, the Hungarians share a similar language structure with the Finnish people far to the north rather than their closer neighbors.

Time for a break from cultural research, so let's head for the heart and soul of Budapest, Vaci Utca (Vatsi Ootsa)—the pedestrian-only shopping area and social headquarters of the city.

The Fontana Department Store, Gerbeaud Cukraszda, the most famous of the cities many coffee houses plus numerous boutiques, shops, stores, restaurants, cafes, and night clubs make up this area. It also includes the vast Central Market Hall with dozens of fruit, vegetable, meat shops, and craft and souvenir booths on the upper level.

After shopping, there are still several things to see and do, including a visit to the Hungarian National Gallery on Castle Hill, which houses the best of Hungarian creative arts from medieval to present day. Matyas Church and Fisherman's Bastion, not far from the palace, are also nearby and offer brilliant architecture and breathtaking views up and down the Danube. Take the funicular to the top.

Another must-see is Margaret Island, a large, green tranquil oasis located on an island in the middle of the Danube just north of the parliament building. It is where city dwellers have gone to rest and relax since 1869.

There is plenty to do and see there, including a Japanese garden, horsedrawn carriage rides, a large outdoor pool complex, a zoo, several churches, ruins and peace and quiet from the city clamor.

There are excellent restaurants throughout the city that offer a greater variety than what you may find in Germany. While there, try one of the country's most renowned dish— goulash. It may not be your

mother's goulash, but it is really a vegetable beef soup with a reddish broth. It tastes very much like vegetable beef soup with a beige broth.

The menus in the Hungarian restaurants we visited had an American flavor with grilled meats and fish prevalent. Most also offered a hot sauce that any Mexican restaurant would be proud of.

Budapest offers uniquely Eastern European food, fun, and culture, but there are enough offerings with hints of America that would make even the most dedicated homebody feel comfortable.

The city is affordable, easy, and fun. So while deciding where to go for your next vacation, consider this enchanting historic city.

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